THE UNEXPECTED GUESTS

BY

W. D. HOWELLS.

HARPER'S BLACK & WHITE SERIES

10

"OH, I DARE SAY HE WON'T MIND."

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A Farce

BY

W. D. HOWELLS

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"WELL, YOU HOARY-HEADED IMPOSTOR, WHAT WOULD YOURS BE?" . . . . *Frontispiece*

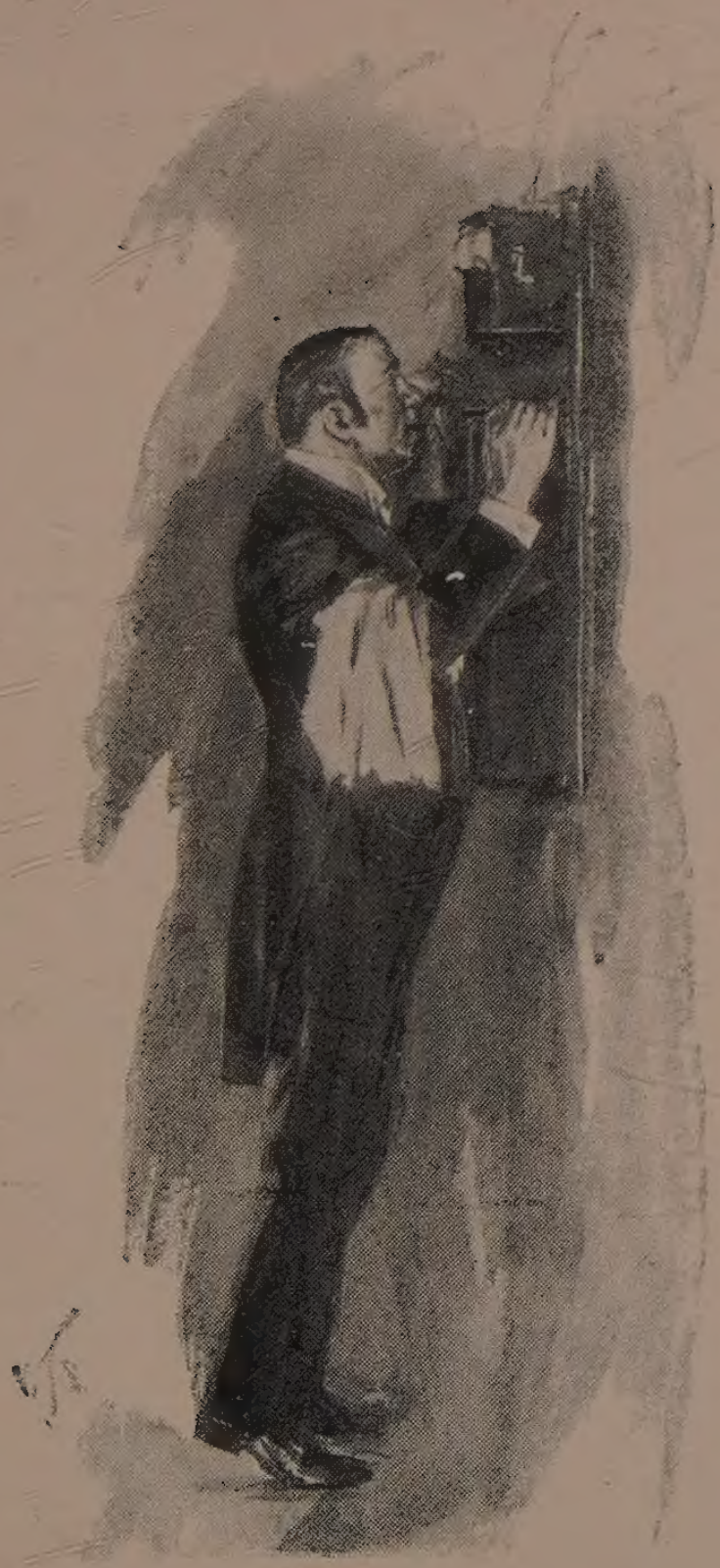
"OH, AUNT MARY!" . . . . . *Faces page* 10

"WHAT IN THE WORLD IS IT, AMY?" 18

"I'M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU!" 24

"OH, I DARE SAY HE WONT MIND." 42

"YES, QUAILS!" 50



"YES, QUAILS!"

THE UNEXPECTED GUESTS

FARCE

MRS. WILLIS CAMPBELL'S DRAWING-ROOM

I

MRS. CAMPBELL, CAMPBELL, DR. LAWTON

Dr. Lawton: "Then truth, as I understand you, Mrs. Campbell, is a female virtue."

Mrs. Campbell: "It is one of them."

Dr. Lawton: "Oh! You have several?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Legions, Dr. Lawton."

Dr. Lawton: "What do you do with them all?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, we just keep them. You may be sure we don't waste them on *men*. What would be the use, for instance, of always telling Willis the truth? He wouldn't believe it, to begin with."

Campbell: "You had better try me once, Amy. My impression is that it's the other thing I can't get away with. And yet I'm a great deal more accustomed to it!"

Mrs. Campbell: "That is neither here nor there. But what I say, and what I insist, is that the conventional lies that people tell are just as much lies as any—just as wicked, and altogether unnecessary. Why should I send word to the door that I'm not at home, or that I'm engaged, when I'm not, merely to get out of seeing a person?"

Campbell: "Because you are such a liar, my love."

Dr. Lawton: "No! Excuse me, Campbell! I don't wish to intercept any little endearments, but really I think that in this case Mrs. Campbell's sacrifice of the truth is a piece of altruism. She knows how it is herself; she wouldn't like to be in the place of the person she wants to get out of seeing. So she sends word that she is not at home, or that she's engaged."

Mrs. Campbell: "Of course I do. Wil-

lis's idea of *truth* would be to send word that he didn't want to see them."

Dr. Lawton, laughing: "I haven't the least doubt of it."

Campbell. "Well, you hoary-headed impostor, what would yours be?"

Dr. Lawton: "Mine? I have none! I have been a general practitioner for forty years. But what time did you ask me for, Mrs. Campbell?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Seven. I don't see what's keeping them all."

Campbell: "The women are not coming."

Mrs. Campbell: "Why?"

Campbell: "Because they said they were. Truth is a female virtue."

Mrs. Campbell: "I must say, I don't see why they're so late. I can't understand, when every woman knows the anxiety of a hostess, how any one can be late. It's very heartless, I think." Mrs. Campbell is in dinner dress; she remains tranquilly seated on the sofa while she speaks, but the movement of her alternately folded and expanded fan betrays the agitation of her spirits. Dr. Lawton,

lounging at large ease in a low chair, regards her with a mixture of admiration and scientific interest. Her husband walks up and down with a surcharge of nervous energy which the husband of a dinner-giver naturally expends when the guests are a little late.

Campbell: "They will probably come in a lump—if they come at all. Don't be discouraged, Amy. If they don't come, I shall be hungry enough, by-and-by, to eat the whole dinner myself."

Mrs. Campbell: "That is a man's idea; you think that the great thing about a dinner is to get it eaten."

Dr. Lawton: "Oh, not *all* of us, Mrs. Campbell!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Well, I will except you, Dr. Lawton."

Campbell: "And what is a woman's idea of a dinner, I should like to know?"

Mrs. Campbell: "To get it over."

Campbell: "In this instance, then, I think you're going to fail. I see no prospect of your getting it over. The people are not coming. I guess you wrote Thursday when you meant Tuesday; didn't

you, Amy? Your Tuesdays always look like Thursdays, anyway."

Mrs. Campbell: "Now, Willis, if you begin your teasing!"

Campbell: "Well, what I want you to do is to tell them what you really think of them when they do come. I don't want any hollow-hearted pretence that it isn't at all late, and that you did not expect them before, and all that kind of thing. You just say, *Yes, you are rather behind time;* and, *No, I didn't write half-past seven; I wrote seven.* With all your devotion to truth, I'll bet you wouldn't dare to speak it once."

Mrs. Campbell: "What will you bet? Come, now! Dr. Lawton will hold the stakes."

Campbell: "Ah, *I* should have to pay, whichever lost, and Lawton would pocket the stakes."

Dr. Lawton: "Try me!"

Campbell: "I'd rather not. It would be too expensive." A ring is heard; and then voices below and on the stairs. "The spell is broken! I hear the stentorian tones of my sister Agnes."

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes, it *is* Agnes; and now they'll all come." She runs out to the space at the top of the stairs which forms a sort of passageway between the drawing-room and library. "Oh, Agnes! I'm *so* glad to see you! And Mr. Roberts!" She says this without, and the shock of kisses penetrates to the drawing-room, where Campbell and Dr. Lawton remain.

Mrs. Roberts, without: "Amy, I'm quite ashamed of myself! I'm afraid we're late. I think Edward's watch must be slow."

Mrs. Campbell, without: "Not at all! I don't believe it's seven yet. I've only just got into my gown."

Campbell: "It *is* a female virtue, Doctor!"

Dr. Lawton: "Oh, there's no doubt of its sex."

Mrs. Campbell, without: "You'll find Willis in the drawing-room with Dr. Lawton, Mr. Roberts."

II

ROBERTS, CAMPBELL, DR. LAWTON

Campbell, as Roberts meekly appears: "Hello, Roberts! You're late, old fellow. You ought to start Agnes dressing just after lunch."

Roberts: "No, I'm afraid it's my fault. How do you do, Dr. Lawton? I think my watch is losing time."

Campbell: "You didn't come your old dodge of stealing a garroter's watch on your way through the Common? That was a tremendous exploit of yours, Roberts."

Dr. Lawton: "And you were at your best that night, Campbell. For a little while I wasn't sure but truth was a boy."

Campbell: "I don't believe old Bemis has quite forgiven Roberts to this day. By-the-way, Bemis is late, too. Wouldn't have helped much to grab his watch tonight, Roberts. Hold on! That's his

voice, now!" As Mr. Bemis enters: "Good-evening, Mr. Bemis. Roberts and I were just talking of that night when you tried to garrote him in the Common, and he got away with your watch."

III

MR. BEMIS AND THE OTHERS

Mr. Bemis, reluctantly: "Oh! very good. Ha, ha, ha!"

Roberts, cringingly: "Ha, ha, ha! Capital!"

Mr. Bemis: "Talking of watches, I hope I'm not late."

Campbell: "About half an hour."

Mrs. Campbell, re-entering and giving her hand: "Don't believe a word of it, Mr. Bemis. You're just in time. Why, even Aunt Mary is not here yet!"

Aunt Mary Crashaw, without: "Yes, I am, my dear—half-way up your ridiculous stairs."

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, Aunt Mary!" She runs out to meet her.

Campbell, to Dr. Lawton: "You see! she can't tell the truth even by accident."

Roberts: "What in the world do you mean, Willis?"

Campbell: "'Sh! It's a bet." To Mrs. Crashaw, coming in with his wife: "You *are* pretty well blown, Aunt Mary."

IV

MRS. CRASHAW, MRS. CAMPBELL, AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Crashaw: "Blown? I wonder I'm alive to reproach Amy for these stairs. Why don't you live in a flat?"

Campbell: "I am going to put in an elevator here, and you can get stuck in it."

Mrs. Crashaw: "I dare say I shall, if *you* put it in. What a frightful experience! I shall never forget that night. How d'ye do, Edward?" She shakes hands with Roberts and Mr. Bemis. "How do you do, Mr. Bemis? I *know* how Dr. Lawton does, without asking."

Dr. Lawton, gallantly: "All the better for—"

Mrs. Crashaw: "*Don't* say, for seeing me! We may *be* chestnuts, doctor, but we needn't speak them." To Mrs. Campbell: "Are you going to have the whole elevator company, as usual?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes—all but Mr. and Mrs. Miller. I asked them, but they had an engagement."

Mrs. Crashaw: "So much the worse for them. Mrs. Curwen will be very much disappointed not to see—Mrs. Miller." The men laugh. She shakes her fan at them. "You ought to be ashamed to provoke me to say such things. Well, now, since I'm here, I wish the others would come. I'm rather hungry, and it's late, isn't it?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Not at all! I don't see why you all think it's late. I'm sure it's very early. Ah, Mrs. Curwen!" She advances upon this lady, who enters with her husband behind her. "So glad you could come. And Mr. Curwen! I didn't hear you coming!"

V.

MR. AND MRS. CURWEN AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Curwen: "That proves you didn't eavesdrop at the head of the stairs, my dear. We were quarrelling all the way up to this threshold. After I'd answered it, I mislaid your invitation, and Mr. Curwen was sure we were asked for Wednesday. But I knew better. As it is, I'm afraid we're rather late."

Mrs. Campbell, forcing a laugh: "We rarely sit down before eight. Oh, Mrs. Bemis! How do you do, Mr. Bemis!" She greets young Mr. and Mrs. Bemis with effusion, as they come in with an air of haste.

VI

YOUNG MR. AND MRS. BEMIS AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Bemis: "Oh, I *know* we're frightfully late!"

Bemis: "Yes, it's quite shocking—"

Mrs. Campbell: "Not at all! Really, I think it must be a conspiracy. Everybody says they are late, and I don't know why."

Campbell: "I do; but I don't like to tell."

Dr. Lawton: "Much safer, my dear boy! Much!"

Mrs. Campbell, ignoring this passage: "If I should make you wait, just to *show* you that it was early, I don't think it would be more than you deserve."

Campbell: "Probably, if you did that, Miss Reynolds would get here too soon."

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes; and she's usually so prompt."

Mrs. Curwen: "I'm beginning to have

the courage of my convictions, Mrs. Campbell. Are you *sure* you didn't say half-past?"

Mrs. Campbell: "I'm sure I can't say. Very likely I may have done so in your note. But I don't see why we are so inflexible about dinner engagements. *I* think we ought to give people at least three-quarters of an hour's grace, instead of that wretched fifteen minutes that keeps everybody's heart in their mouth." The door-bell sounds. "Ah! That's Miss Reynold's ring, and—"

Campbell: "We are saved! I was afraid we were going to be thirteen at table."

Mrs. Roberts: "Thirteen! What do you mean, Willis?"

Campbell: "Why, one from twelve, you know."

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, yes." The others laugh.

Mrs. Campbell: "Don't notice him, Agnes. He's in one of his very worst ways to-night."

Mrs. Roberts: "But I don't see what the joke is!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Neither do I, Agnes. I—"

A Ghostly Voice, as of an asthmatic spectre speaking through an imperfectly attached set of artificial teeth, makes itself heard from the library: "Truth crushed to earth will rise again. For God's eternal years are hers—er—r—r—ck—ck—cr—cr—cr—ee—ck—"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Good heavens, Willis, what in the world is that?"

The Voice: "This is the North America Company's perfected phonograph, invented by Thomas A.—cr—cr—cr—ee—ee—ck—ck—ck—New Jersey. This cylinder was—cr—cr—elocutionist—ee—ee—ck—Cullen Bryant— Truth crushed to—cr—cr—ck—ck—"

Campbell: "Don't be alarmed, Aunt Mary. It's just a phonograph that I had got in to amuse you after dinner. It don't seem to be exactly in order. Perhaps the cylinder's got dry, or Jim hasn't got quite the right pressure on—"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Is Jim in there?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes; Agnes has lent him to us to-day. I adore boys, and

Jim has been angelic the whole afternoon."

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, you're *too* good, Amy!"

Mrs. Crashaw: "I don't wonder he's been angelic, with a thing like that to play with. I should be angelic myself. Why can't we go and be amused with it a little before dinner, Willis?"

The Others, respectively: "Oh, yes. Do. By all means. I never heard one before. We really can't wait. Let us hear it now, Mr. Campbell! Do make him, Mrs. Campbell."

Campbell: "Well, all right. I'll go with you—" He stops, feeling himself significantly clutched by the wrist, and arrested in mid-career, by Mrs. Campbell. "Or, Jim can show it off. It'll do him so much good. I'll let Jim." The guests follow one another out with cries of real and simulated interest, and Campbell turns to his wife: "What in the world is it, Amy?"

VII

MR. AND MRS. CAMPBELL

Mrs. Campbell: "What is it? I shall die, Willis!"

Campbell: "Well, speak first."

Mrs. Campbell: "Something's happened to the dinner, I know. And I'm afraid to go and see. The cook's so cross!"

Campbell: "Well, shall *I* go?"

Mrs. Campbell: "And if you keep up this teasing of yours, you'll simply kill me."

Campbell: "Well, I won't, then. But it's very lucky your guests are belated too, Amy. Now, if you *could* get the dinner on in about ten minutes, we should be just right. But you've told them all they were so early that they'll believe the delay is all yours."

Mrs. Campbell: "They won't believe anything of the kind! They know better. But I don't dare—"

Jane, the waitress, appearing through the portière of the drawing-room: "Dinner is ready, Mrs. Campbell."

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, well, then, do get them started, Willis! Don't forget, it's young Mrs. Bemis you're to take down —*not* Mrs. Curwen."

Campbell: "Oh, no! I sha'n't forget that. I hope Mrs. Curwen won't. Hello! There's another ring. Who in the world is that?"

Mrs. Campbell: "'Sh! If that horrid, squeaking phonograph—"

The Phonograph, from the library: "Truth crushed to earth will—"

Mrs. Campbell: "Good gracious! I can't hear a word. Hark! It's Miss Reynolds talking with some one in the reception-room, and it sounds like—but it can't be—no, it can't—it—it *is*—yes! And that's *his* voice too, Willis! What does it mean? Am I losing my five senses? Or am I simply going stark, staring mad?"

Campbell: "You don't say the Millers have come?"

Mrs. Campbell: "The Millers? No!

Who cares anything about the Millers? 'Sh!" She listens.

Campbell, listening: "Why, it's the Belforts!"

Mrs. Campbell: "How can you *dare* to say it, Willis? Of course it's the Belforts. Hark!" She listens.

Campbell, listening: "But I thought you said they declined, too."

Mrs. Campbell: "They did. It's some frightful mystery. Be still, do, Willis!"

Campbell: "Why, I'm not making any noise. It's the froufrou of that dress of yours."

Mrs. Campbell: "It's your shirt bosom. You always *will* have them so stiff; and you keep breathing so."

Campbell: "Oh, well, if you don't want me to breathe!"

Mrs. Campbell, desperately: "It doesn't matter. It wouldn't help now if you *never* breathed again. Don't joke, Willis! I can't bear it. If you do, I shall scream."

Campbell: "I wasn't going to joke. It's too serious. What are you going to do?"

Mrs. Campbell: "I don't know. We

must do anything to keep them from finding out that they weren't expected."

Campbell: "But how do you suppose it's happened, Amy?"

Mrs. Campbell: "I don't know. They meant to decline somewhere else and accept here, and they mixed the letters. It's always happening. But be still now! They're coming up, and all we can do is to keep them in the dark as well as we can. You must help me, Willis."

Campbell: "Oh, there's nothing I like better than throwing dust in people's eyes. It's my native element."

Mrs. Campbell: "Of course it puts the table all out, and we've got to rearrange the places, and think who is going to take out who again as soon as we can get rid of them. Be making up some pretext, Willis. We've got to consult together, or else we are completely lost. You'll have to stay and keep talking, while I run down and make them put another leaf into the table. I don't believe there's room enough now, and I'm not certain about the quails. The cook said she didn't believe they were all nice. How can peo-

ple be so careless about notes! I think it's really criminal. There ought to be something done about it. If people won't read their notes over they ought to be told about it, and I've the greatest mind to say at once that they sent a refusal, and I wasn't expecting them. It would serve them right."

Campbell: "Yes, and it would be such a relief to your feelings. I wish you *would* do it, Amy. Just for once."

Mrs. Campbell: "I shall have to take the table-cloth off if I put another leaf in, and the whole thing has got to be re-arranged, decorations and everything; and I'd got the violets scattered so carelessly. Now I shall just *fling* them on. I don't care how they look. I'm completely discouraged, and I shall just go through it all like a stone."

Campbell: "Like a precious stone. You *are* such a perfect little brick, Amy."

Mrs. Campbell: "I guess you wouldn't like it yourself, Willis. And the Belforts are just the people I should have liked to do my best before, and now their being here spoils everything."

Campbell, smiling: "It *is* a complication!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, yes, giggle, do! I suppose you'd expect me to be logical, as you call it, with my dying breath."

Campbell: "No, I shouldn't, Amy; but I know you'd be delightful under any circumstances. You always get there just the same, whether you take the steps or not. But brace up now, dear, and you'll come out all right. Tell them the truth and I'll stand by you. I don't want any better fun." He slips behind his wife, who gives him a ghastly glance over her shoulder as the Belforts enter the room with Miss Reynolds.

VIII

THE BELFORTS, MISS REYNOLDS, AND THE CAMPBELLS

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, how do you do, Maria?" She kisses Miss Reynolds, and then, with gay cordiality, gives her hand to Mrs. Belfort. "I'm *so* glad to see you!" She shakes hands with Belfort. "So kind of you to come."

Miss Reynolds: "I'm sorry to be a little late, Amy; but better late than never, I suppose."

Mrs. Belfort: "I'm not so sure of that. Dear Mrs. Campbell! I wish you would be quite frank with me!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Late? Frank? What do you mean, both of you? You know you're never late, Maria; and why should I be frank with you, Mrs. Belfort?"

Campbell: "What do you take us for?"

Mrs. Belfort, holding Mrs. Campbell's

"I'M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU!"

hand clasped between both of hers: "For the very nicest and kindest people in the world, who wouldn't let me have the mortification of deranging them on any account. Did you expect us this evening?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Expect you? What a strange question! Why in the world shouldn't we expect you?"

Campbell: "What an extraordinary idea!"

Mrs. Belfort: "Because I had to hurry away from Mrs. Miller's tea when I went home to dress, and when I told her we were coming here to dinner, she said, 'Oh, you are *going*, then?' in such a way that, though she covered it up afterwards, and said she didn't mean anything, and she didn't know why she had spoken, I felt sure there must be some misunderstanding, and I've come quite ready to be sent away again if there is. Didn't you get my note?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Your note? Why, of course I did!"

Mrs. Belfort: "Then it's all right. *Such* a relief! Now I feel that I can breathe freely again."

Mr. Belfort: "I assure you, Mrs. Campbell, it's a relief to me, too. I've never seen my wife of quite so many minds as she's been for the last hour and a half. She was quite encyclopedic."

Campbell: "Oh, I know how that is, my dear boy. I've known Mrs. Campbell change hers as often as an unabridged dictionary in great emergencies."

Mrs. Belfort: "But really, the only thing for us to do was to come, as I felt from the beginning, in spite of my doubts what to do. I thought I could depend upon you to send us away if we weren't wanted; but if we were, and didn't come, you couldn't very well have sent for us."

Mrs. Campbell, gayly: "Indeed I should!"

Campbell, gallantly: "The dinner would have been nothing without you."

Mrs. Belfort: "I don't know about that, but I'm sure we should have been nothing without the dinner. We were *so* glad to come. I waited a little while about answering, till I could see whether we could be free of a sort of provisional engagement we had hanging over us.

Even after we got here, though, I'd half a mind to run away, and we've been catechising poor Miss Reynolds down in the reception-room till she wouldn't stand it any longer, and so here we are."

Mrs. Campbell: "And I'm perfectly delighted. If you had yielded to any such ridiculous misgiving, I should never have forgiven you. I'm sure I don't know what Mrs. Miller could have—"

The Phonograph in the library: "Truth crushed to earth will cr—cr-r-r-r—ck—ck—cr—"

Mrs. Belfort: "A phonograph! Oh, have you got one? I *must* hear it!"

Campbell: "Well, won't you come into the library? My nephew is in there, driving everybody mad with it. He'll be perfectly delighted with a fresh victim."

Mrs. Belfort: "And I shall be charmed to offer myself up. Come, Miss Reynolds. Come, Roger."

Campbell: "Yes, come along, Belfort." He leads the way to the door, and then adroitly slips back to his wife, who has abandoned herself wildly upon the sofa.

IX

CAMPBELL AND MRS. CAMPBELL

Mrs. Campbell: "Well, now, what are you going to do, Willis?"

Campbell: "*I'm* not going to do anything. *I* haven't been flying in the face of Providence. If ever there was a woman offered a clean and safe way out! But since you preferred to remain in this labyrinth—this Black Forest of improbabilities—"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, don't torment me, Willis! Don't you see that her taking it that way made it all the more impossible for me to tell her of the blunder she had committed? I simply couldn't do it, then."

Campbell: "I don't see how you could help doing it, then."

Mrs. Campbell: "When she behaved so magnanimously about it, and put herself in my power? I would sooner have

died, and she knew it perfectly well. That's the reason she *was* so magnanimous. You wouldn't have done it yourself after that. But it's no use talking about that now. We've got to do something, and you've got to think what we shall do. Now think!"

Campbell: "What about?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, don't tease, dearest! About the trouble—and who shall take out who—and the quails. You know what!"

Campbell: "Well, I think if we leave those people alone much longer, they'll all come out here and ask if they weren't mistaken in supposing they were expected."

Mrs. Campbell, whimpering: "Oh, there you go! How perfectly heartless!"

X

MRS. ROBERTS AND THE CAMPBELLS

Mrs. Roberts, showing herself at the door: "Amy, dear, what *is* the matter? Didn't you tell me the Belforts were not coming? Is that what's keeping you out here? I just knew it was!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes, Agnes; but do go back to them, and keep them amused. Willis and I are trying to think what to do. I've got to rearrange the whole table, you know, and I'm not sure whether there'll be quails enough to go round."

Mrs. Roberts: "Don't worry about that, Amy. I won't take any, and I'll give Edward a hint about them."

Campbell: "And Roberts is capable of asking you before the whole company why you don't want him to take quail. There's nothing like Roberts for presence of mind and any little bit of *finesse* like that. No, it won't do for the entire con-

nection to fight shy of quail. Mrs. Belfort has got her suspicions roused, and she'd be on to a thing of that kind like lightning. She's got the notion that she wasn't expected, somehow, and she's been making it hot for Amy—trying to get her to own up, and all that. If it hadn't been for me, Amy *would* have owned up, too. But I kept my eye on her, and she lied out of it like a little man."

Mrs. Campbell: "It isn't so, Agnes. He *wanted* me to tell the truth about it, as he calls it—"

Mrs. Roberts: "What an idea! You might as well have died at once. I don't see what you could have been thinking of, Willis!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes, he can't understand yet why I shouldn't, when Mrs. Belfort asked me if there wasn't some mistake, and literally threw herself on my mercy. She had no business to do it, and I shall always think it was taking a mean advantage; but I wasn't going to let myself be outdone in magnanimity. I shouldn't have thought she would be capable of it."

Mrs. Roberts: "It wasn't very nice; but I suppose she was excited. We mustn't blame her, and you did the only thing that any human creature could do. I'm surprised at Willis; or, rather, I'm *not* surprised."

Campbell: "Well, don't let it keep you away from our other guests, Agnes."

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, yes; *do* go back to them, Agnes, dear! I have got to arrange all over again now, about who's to go out with who, you know. I shall want you to let Edward take Mrs. Curwen, and—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, Amy, you know I'd do anything for you, especially in a case like this; but I *can't* let Edward take Mrs. Curwen out. I don't mind her flirting; she does that with every one; but she always gets Edward to laughing so that it attracts the attention of the whole table, and—"

Campbell: "That's a very insignificant matter. I'll take out Mrs. Curwen, myself—"

Mrs. Campbell: "No, indeed you won't!

You always get *her* laughing, and that's a great deal worse."

Campbell: "Well, well, I won't, then. But we can arrange that afterwards."

Mrs. Campbell: "No, we'll settle it now, if you please; and I don't want you to go *near* Mrs. Curwen. She'll be sure to see that there's something wrong from the delay, and she'll try to find it out, and if she should I shall simply perish on the spot. She'll try to get round you and make you tell, and I want you to promise me, Willis, on your bended knees, that you won't let it out. She's insufferable enough as it is, but if she got to sympathizing with me, or patronizing me about such a thing, as she'd be sure to do, I don't know what I *should* do. Will you promise?"

Campbell: "Oh, I promise. Look out you don't tell her yourself, Amy! But now I've got to see that there's enough to eat, under this new deal, and the great question is about the quail, and I've thought how to manage that. I'll just run down to the telephone, and send to the club for them. We can have them

here inside of a half-hour, and never turn a feather."

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, Willis, you *are* inspired. Well, I shall always say that when there is any real thinking to be done— But hurry back, do, dear, and Agnes and I will be trying to settle who shall take out— Oh, I'm afraid you won't get back in time to help us! It takes so long to telephone the simplest thing."

Campbell: "I'll be back in one-quarter of a second." He rushes out, brushing by Mrs. Crashaw, who enters at the same moment from the library.

XI

MRS. CRASHAW AND THE OTHER LADIES; THEN CAMPBELL

Mrs. Crashaw: "Amy, child, what in the world has happened? What are you staying out here away from your company for? Where's Willis going? What's Agnes doing here? It's perfectly scandalous to leave all those people alone!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, Aunt Mary, if you only knew, you wouldn't scold us! Don't you see the Belforts have come?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Yes, of course they've come, and after they declined; I understand that. But it's only a matter of two plates more at the table—"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, is it? And am I to let *him* go down with *her?* The whole affair has got to be planned over, and another leaf put in, and the table rearranged, and I don't know what all."

Mrs. Roberts: "And Willis has gone

down to telephone to the club for more quails."

Mrs. Crashaw, to Mrs. Campbell: "You don't mean that you only got just quails enough?"

Mrs. Campbell, indignantly: "A dinner for ten is not a dinner for twelve. I may not have kept house so long as you, Aunt Mary, but I'm not *quite* a child!" At this critical moment Campbell returns. "Well, will they send them?"

Campbell: "Yes, yes. It's all right. I couldn't get the club, just now; Central was busy; but I've primed Green's man, down below, and he'll call them up in a minute. He understands it. I thought I'd hurry back and see if I could be of use. Well, have you got things all straight?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "No; we've spent the time in getting them crookeder, if possible. I've insinuated that Amy didn't know how to order her dinner, and she's told me I'm an old woman. I *am* an old woman, Amy, and you mustn't regard me. I think my mind's going." She kisses Mrs. Campbell, who clasps her in a forgiving embrace.

Mrs. Campbell: "Mine's *gone*, Aunt Mary, or I never could have taken anything amiss from *you!* I don't see how I shall live through it. I don't know what to do; it seems to get worse every moment."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Why, you don't suppose the Belforts *suspect* anything, do you?"

Mrs. Campbell: "That's the worst of it. I thought I ought to let the Millers know who had failed when I asked them so late; and the Belforts were there at tea this afternoon, and Mrs. Miller let out her surprise that they were coming. So, of course, I had a double duty."

Campbell: "But, thank goodness, she was equal to it, Aunt Mary. I've had to do some tall lying in my time, but I never soared to the heights that Amy reached with the Belforts, in my palmiest days."

Mrs. Crashaw: "Well, then, if she convinced them that their suspicions were wrong, it's all right; and if the quails are coming from the club, I don't see what there is to worry about. We must be thankful that you could get out of it so easily."

Mrs. Campbell: "But we're *not* out of it. The table has to be rearranged, but I can have that done now somehow, while we're waiting for the quails. The great thing is to manage about the going out. It happens very fortunately that if I tell all the other men whom they're to take out, Mr. Belfort can't suppose that he was an after-thought. But I can't seem to make a start with a new arrangement, in my own mind."

Campbell: "You've used up all your invention in convincing the Belforts that they were expected. Good gracious, here's Dr. Lawton! What do you want here, you venerable opprobrium of science?"

XII

DR. LAWTON AND THE OTHERS

Dr. Lawton, standing at ease on the threshold of the drawing-room: "Nothing. I merely got tired of hearing the praises of truth chanted in there, and came out here for—a little change."

Campbell: "Well, you can't stay. You've got to go back, and help keep the Belforts from supposing they weren't expected, if it takes all your hoarded wisdom as a general practitioner for forty years."

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh yes; do go back, doctor!"

Dr. Lawton: "What has been the treatment up to the present time?"

Campbell: "The most heroic kind. Amy has spared neither age nor sex, in the use of whoppers. You know what she is, doctor, when she has a duty to perform."

Dr. Lawton: "But whoppers, as I understand, are always of one sex. They may be old; they often are, I believe; but they are invariably masculine."

Campbell: "Oh, that doesn't prevent women's using them. They use all of us."

Dr. Lawton: "Well, then, there's no need of my going back on that account. In fact, I may congratulate Mrs. Campbell on the most complete success. The Belforts are thoroughly deceived."

Mrs. Campbell, with tremulous eagerness: "Oh, do you *think* so, doctor? If I could only believe that, how happy I should be!"

Dr. Lawton: "You may be sure of it, Mrs. Campbell. Belfort doesn't count, of course?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "Of course not; men will believe anything that's told them."

Dr. Lawton: "And I don't allude to *him*. But Mrs. Belfort got me to one side as soon as she saw me, and told me she had been afraid there was something wrong, but Mrs. Campbell had assured her that she had got her note of accept-

ance, and now she was going to give her whole mind to the phonograph's beautiful rendering of Bryant's poem on truth."

Mrs. Roberts: "There, Amy, you see there's no reason to worry about that!"

Mrs. Crashaw: "No; the only thing now is to get your dinner on the table, child, and let us eat it as soon as possible."

Campbell: "Yes, if Lawton's telling the truth."

The Ladies: "Willis!"

Dr. Lawton: "Don't mind him, ladies! The experiences of his early life in California, you know, must have been very unfavorable to a habit of confidence in his fellow-men. I pity him."

XIII

MRS. CURWEN AND THE OTHERS

Mrs. Curwen, appearing with young Mr. Bemis: "Dr. Lawton, I wish you would go and bring your daughter here. She's flirting outrageously with my husband." In making this accusation, Mrs. Curwen casts the eye of experienced coquetry at young Mr. Bemis, who laughs foolishly.

Dr. Lawton: "Oh, I dare say he won't mind; he must be so used to it."

Mrs. Curwen: "What do you mean, Dr. Lawton? What does he mean, Mr. Campbell?"

Campbell: "I couldn't imagine, for the life of me."

Mrs. Curwen: "Can *you* tell, Mrs. Campbell?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, I *never* tell—such things."

Mrs. Curwen: "What mysteries! Well,

can you tell me what makes Mrs. Belfort so uncommonly gay, this evening? She seems to be in the greatest spirits, laughing with everybody—Mr. Bemis *père*, and Mr. Roberts."

Mrs. Campbell: "Mrs. Belfort?"

Mrs. Curwen: "Yes. She seems a little hysterical. I wonder if anything's happened?"

Mrs. Campbell, sweeping the circle of her confidants with a look of misery: "What could have happened?"

Dr. Lawton: "It's merely the pleasure of finding herself in your company, Mrs. Curwen."

Mrs. Curwen: "Oh, thank you, Dr. Lawton. I know that I scatter sunshine in my path, but not to that extent, I think." With winning appeal: "Oh, what *is* the cat in the meal, doctor?" To young Mr. Bemis, archly: "*Do* make them tell me, Mr. Bemis!"

Young Mr. Bemis, with the air of epigram: "I'm sure *I* don't know." He chokes with flattered laughter.

Mrs. Curwen: "How cruel of you not even to try!" She makes eyes at young

Mr. Bemis, and then transfers them rapidly to Campbell: "Won't you just whisper it in my ear, Mr. Campbell? Mrs. Roberts, you can't imagine what nice things your husband's been saying to me! I didn't know he paid compliments. And now I suppose he's devoting himself to Mrs. Belfort. Perhaps it was that made her so lively. He began at once. He's *so* amusing. I envy you having such a husband always about."

Young Mr. Bemis, in the belief that he is saying something gallant: "I'm sure we're none of us so hard-hearted as to envy *you;* Mrs. Curwen."

Mrs. Curwen: "Oh, *thank* you, Mr. Bemis! I shall really be afraid to tell Mr. Curwen *all* you say." She laughs, and Campbell joins her, even under the reproachful gaze of his wife and sister. Mrs. Curwen turns coaxingly to him: "*Do* tell!"

Campbell: "Tell what?"

Mrs. Curwen: "Well—" She pauses thoughtfully, and then suddenly adds: "Who's going to take me out to dinner."

Mrs. Campbell, surprised into saying

it: "Why, it's all disarranged now by the Belforts—" She stops, and a thrill of dismay at her self-betrayal makes itself apparent in the spectators.

Mrs. Curwen, with clasped hands: "*Don't* say by the Belforts coming unexpectedly! Oh, *dear* Mrs. Campbell, I know how to pity you! That very thing happened to me last winter. Only, it was Mrs. Miller who came after she'd declined; she said Mr. Miller wouldn't come without her. But why do you mind it? *We* all went out pell-mell. Such fun! But it must have taken all Mr. Campbell's ingenuity to keep them from suspecting."

Campbell: "More, too. I was nowhere."

Mrs. Curwen, with caressing deference to Mrs. Campbell: "Of course you were not needed. But isn't it shocking how one has to manage in such an emergency? I really believe it would be better to tell the truth sometimes. Don't you?"

Mrs. Campbell: "It's all very well telling the truth if they don't suspect anything. But when people tax you with their mistakes, and try to make you own

up that they've blundered, then of course you *have* to deny it."

Mrs. Roberts: "You simply *have* to."

Mrs. Crashaw: "There's no other way, in that case, even if you'd prefer to tell the truth."

Mrs. Curwen: "Oh, in that case, yes, indeed. *Poor* Mrs. Campbell! I can imagine how annoying it must have been; but I *should* have liked to hear you getting out of it! What *did* you say? *I'm* so transparent, people see through me at once."

Campbell: "Are you?"

Dr. Lawton: "Don't you think you're a little hard on yourself, Mrs. Curwen?"

Mrs. Curwen, with burlesque meekness and sincerity: "No, not the least. It's simple justice." Mr. Curwen enters with Roberts. "You can ask my husband if you don't believe *me*. Or no, I'll put the case to him myself. Fred, dear, if people when I didn't expect to dinner, came, *could* I keep them from discovering that they weren't expected? You know how awkward I am about such things—little fibs, and all that?"

XIV

ROBERTS, CURWEN, AND THE OTHERS; THEN THE BELFORTS

Curwen: "Well, I don't know—"

Mrs. Curwen, shaking her fan at him during the general laugh: "Oh, what a wicked husband! *You* don't believe I could fib out of such a thing, *do* you, Mr. Roberts?"

Roberts, gallantly: "If I knew what the thing was?"

Mrs. Curwen: "Why, like the Belforts— Oh, *poor* Mrs. Campbell! I *didn't* mean to let it out!"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, it doesn't matter. Would you like to go and tell the Belforts themselves? Or, you needn't go: they're coming here."

Mrs. Belfort, returning from the library, followed by her husband and the elder Mr. Bemis: "How perfectly the phonograph renders that piece, Mr. Campbell! I've never heard anything like it."

Campbell: "It's all in practice. You wouldn't hear anything else here, Mrs. Belfort. It's my favorite poem. And I'm happy to find that Mrs. Curwen likes it as much as I do."

Mrs. Curwen: "I adore it!"

The Phonograph, within: "Truth crushed to earth will rise again."

Campbell: "Every time! But I wish Jim would change the cylinder. I like a little vari—"

A Sound from the regions below, something like, "Woor, roor, roor; woor, roor, roor!" and then a voice: "Hello! Is that you, Central? Well, give me two hundred and forty-one, please! Yes, two, four, one: Iroquois Club. Yes! What? Yes, Iroquois Club—two forty-one. Well, hurry up! Is that you, Iroquois? Yes? Busy? Well, that won't work. I don't care if you *are* busy. You've got to take my message, and take it right away. Hear that?"

Campbell: "Hear it? I should think they could! That confounded fool has left the closet-door open!" He rushes out and down the stairs, while the others as-

sume various attitudes of sympathy and dismay, and Mrs. Curwen bows herself into her fan, and the voice below continues.

The Voice: "Well, why don't you send them quails you promised half an hour ago? What? Who is it? It's Mr. Campbell. C, a, m, Cam, m, e, l, mel, Campbell. One hump! What? Oh, hump yourself! It's Mr. Cam—"

Campbell's voice from below: "Why the deuce don't you shut that closet-door? Shut it! Shut it! We can hear you all over the house, the way you yell. Don't you know how to use a telephone? Shut that door, anyway!"

The Voice: "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I didn't think about the door. I didn't know it was open. All right, sir." There is the sound of a closing door, and then, as Campbell rejoins his guests with a flushed face, the woor-roor-rooring of the electric bell begins again. "Iroquois! Is this Iroquois? No, I don't want you; I want Iroquois. Well, is that Iroquois now?" The words are at first muffled; then they grow more and more distinct,

in spite of the intervening door. "Yes, quails! A dozen roast quails. You got the order half an hour ago. There's a lot of folks come that they didn't expect, and they got to have some more birds. Well, hurry up, then! Good-by! Woor-roor!"

Campbell, amid the consternation of the company, while Mrs. Belfort fixes his wife with an eye of mute reproach: "Now, my dear, this is so awful that nothing can be done about it on the old lines."

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes; I give it up. Mrs. Belfort, I tried my very best to keep you from suspecting, and even when you did suspect, I'm sure you must say that I did all I could. But fate was against me."

Mrs. Curwen: "Oh, *poor* Mrs. Campbell! *Must* you own up?"

Mrs. Belfort: "But I don't understand. You got my note of acceptance, didn't you?"

Mrs. Campbell: "But it *wasn't* a note of acceptance: it was a note of regret!"

Mrs. Belfort: "Indeed it was not!"

Mrs. Campbell: "I knew just how it

had happened as soon as I saw you this evening, and I determined that wild horses should not get the truth out of me." Campbell and Dr. Lawton exchange signals of admiration. "You must have been writing two notes, declining somewhere else, and then got them mixed. It's always happening."

Campbell: "It's one of the commonest things in the world—on the stage; and ever since a case of the kind happened to Mrs. Campbell down at the Shore, one summer, she's known how to deal with it."

Mrs. Belfort: "But I *didn't* write two notes and get them mixed. I wrote but one, to tell Mrs. Campbell how very glad I was to come. Do you happen to have kept my note?"

Mrs. Campbell: "They are all here in this desk, and"—running to it, and pulling it open—"here is yours." She reads: "'*Dear Mrs. Campbell, I am very sorry to be so late in answering. An out-of-town engagement for the tenth, which has been hanging over us in a threatening way for the past fortnight—*'" Mrs. Campbell turns the leaf, and continues reading

in a murmur that finally fades into the silence of utter dismay.

Campbell: "Well, my dear?"

Mrs. Crashaw: "What in the world is it, child?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Amy!"

Mrs. Curwen: "Oh, not *another* mystery, I hope!"

Campbell: "Go on, Amy, or shall I—"

Mrs. Campbell, reading desperately on: "'*—for the past fortnight, is happily off at last, and I am very glad indeed to accept your kind invitation for dinner at seven on that day, for Mr. Belfort and myself*—'" She lets her hands, with the letter stretched between them, fall dramatically before her.

Campbell: "Well, my dear, there seems to be a pretty clear case against you, and unless you can plead mind-transference, or something like that—"

Mrs. Roberts: "I'm sure it's mind-transference, Amy! I've often been through the same experience myself. Just take the opposite of what's said."

Mrs. Campbell, in a daze: "But I don't

see— Yes, now I begin to remember how it must have been—how it was. I know now, but I don't know how I can ever forgive myself for such carelessness, when I'm always so particular about notes— "

Campbell: "Yes, I've even heard you say it was criminal to read them carelessly. I can bear witness for you there."

Mrs. Roberts: "I'm sure I could too, Amy, in a court of justice."

Mrs. Campbell: "Yes, I was just going out when your note came, Mrs. Belfort, and I read the first page—down to '*for the past fortnight*'—and I took it for granted that the opening regret meant a refusal, and just dropped it into my desk and gave you up. It's inexcusable, perfectly inexcusable! I'm quite at your feet, Mrs. Belfort, and I shall not blame you at all if you can't forgive me. What shall I say to you?"

Mrs. Belfort, amiably: "Nothing, my dear, except that you will let me stay, now I'm here!"

Mrs. Campbell "How sweet you are! You shall *live* with us!"

Campbell: "Truth crushed to earth!

It's perfectly wonderful! Mrs. Campbell can't get away from it when she tries her best. She tells it in spite of herself. She supposed she wasn't telling it when she said there was no mistake on your part; but she *was*. Well, it *is* a feminine virtue, doctor."

Dr. Lawton: "Unquestionably, I think that it came into the world with woman."

Mrs. Campbell, with mounting courage: "Yes a pretty predicament I should have been in, Willis, if I had taken your advice, and told the truth, as you call it, in the beginning. But now we won't wait any longer. The quails will come in their own good time. My dear, will you give Mrs. Belfort your arm? And, Mr. Belfort, will you give me yours?"

Mrs. Curwen: "And all the rest of us?"

Mrs. Campbell: "Oh, you can come out pell-mell."

Mrs. Curwen: "Oh, *dear* Mrs. Campbell!"

THE END.

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